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SUBJECT: ROK PROVIDES UPDATE ON TIES TO IRAN

Classified By: A/POL Sung Y. Kim. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On May 9, Ma Young-sam, MOFAT's Director-General for the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, requested a meeting with A/POL to reiterate Seoul's concerns about Iran's nuclear activities and to update the USG on two developments in ROK-Iranian relations: First, the ROK was considering holding a bilateral contact between Foreign Minister Ban and his Iranian counterpart on the sidelines of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) meeting in Qatar, May 23-24. Second, the ROK also planned to host the 10th round of economic talks with Iranian officials June 13-17. Ma said that Seoul deemed these developments as separate from the nuclear issue, would appreciate USG understanding, and would welcome the opportunity to provide further updates. END SUMMARY.

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BILATERAL CONTACT AT ACD

2. (C) In a May 9 meeting with A/POL, Ma Young-sam, Director-General of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, emphasized that the ROK position on the Iranian nuclear issue remained unchanged. Seoul continued to have concerns about Iranian activities. For this reason, the ROK had refused the Iranian government's repeated requests for a South Korean Foreign Ministerial visit to Tehran, or an Iranian Foreign Ministerial visit to Seoul. Aware that Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon planned to attend the Asia Cooperation Dialogue meeting in Doha, Qatar May 23-24, Tehran again invited FM Ban to visit, but Seoul declined. Tehran then suggested a bilateral contact on the sidelines of the ACD, which Seoul thought would be appropriate.

3. (C) Ma said planning for this possible contact was still in the preliminary stages. Should a meeting occur, he stressed that Seoul would reiterate ROK concerns about Iranian nuclear activities. South Korea would not deviate from its close cooperation with the United States on the Iranian nuclear issue. Ma said Seoul welcomed the opportunity to answer any questions Washington might have,

and, in the spirit of close coordination, would be happy to provide appropriate updates.

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10TH ROUND OF BILATERAL ECONOMIC TALKS

¶4. (C) Ma also said that Seoul and Tehran were planning to hold the 10th round of their Joint Economic Commission (JEC) June 13-17 in Korea. This was partly in response to an Iranian request to invigorate the talks. Established over 20 years ago, the JEC was intended to meet annually but had not convened since 2002. Trade Minister Kim Hyun-chong would head the South Korean delegation, and the Iranian Minister for Industries and Mines would probably lead the Iranian side. The focus would be on economic issues because Seoul considered the nuclear issue a separate problem. The first two days would be governmental meetings and the last two days would be talks between private businessmen.

¶5. (C) Ma emphasized that Seoul understood the great international sensitivity of the Iranian issue, which was why it wanted to raise these developments in advance with Washington. Seoul would appreciate USG understanding and would welcome any comment or questions, he noted.
MINTON